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C O N F I D E N T I A L TBILISI 000697

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [RU](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: OSCE AND EUMM REPORT RUSSIAN TROOP  
INCREASES IN LEAD UP TO APRIL 9 PROTESTS

REF: A. TBILISI 679  
[1](#)B. 4/7/09 TBILISI UPDATE (E-MAIL)

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and Comment. While Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov keeps warning of potential Georgian belligerence on April 9, the view from Tbilisi looks exactly the opposite. OSCE, UNOMIG and EUMM monitors are reporting to us that they do not see a Georgian threat, but they do see a substantial increase of Russian troops in Akhalkori and in Abkhazia. This activity coincides with an uncompromising line by the extreme Georgian opposition (ref A). They are rejecting calls for political dialogue, issued by the Ambassador, the Patriarch, the EU and President Saakashvili and insist they will stay on the streets until Saakashvili resigns. They seem to be counting on a large crowd to give them legitimacy. Moreover, Tbilisi is awash with rumors (from the government and others) of Russian money being funneled into the coffers of the radical opposition (reportedly in part through Nino Burjanadze). We do not have hard evidence to confirm these rumors, but the coincidence of this with the increase in Russian troops is disturbing. End Summary and Comment.

[1](#)2. (C) On April 8 an OSCE monitor and an EUMM political advisor told us that they had met with Russian Colonel Anatoliy Tarasov, Armed Forces Commandant of South Ossetia, on April 6. The OSCE monitor confirmed that Tarasov reported the Russians would have more troops than usual in the Akhalkori Valley the week of April 6. Reportedly, this number could reach as high as one and a half battalions, or 1,500 troops. The OSCE monitor added that Tarasov had said something along the lines of, "If we go back in, we going all the way." He also noted that Tarasov is due to retire in three months. The monitor repeated the OSCE's observations (ref B) of increased Georgian forces in some spots and substantial positions established along the ridge south of the main east-west highway.

[1](#)3. (C) An EUMM political advisor confirmed that the increased numbers of Russian forces in Akhalkori will be substantial. While he did not have a precise idea of how many, he guessed it could be as many as 2,000. He said Tarasov's explanation was that twice a year, as the "winter troops" are rotated out and the "summer troops" are rotated in, they conduct joint exercises during the overlap period. The EUMM political advisor believed the winter exercises were underway, although he wondered aloud why winter exercises would be held in April. He said Tarasov was pleased that the EUMM will have additional patrols out during the protests, but Tarasov expressed concern about provocations.

[1](#)4. (C) According to the OSCE monitor, Russian forces brought the following equipment into the zone of conflict in Gali on April 7:

6 x 152mm self-propelled gun  
23 x T-72 tanks  
4 x armored mobile command posts (tracked vehicles)  
15 x BTR-80 (armored personnel carriers)

9-10 x MBRL System BM-21 "GRAD" rocket launchers  
23 x Ural trucks carrying equipment/ammo/stores  
2 x ambulances  
4 x communication vehicles  
3 x maintenance vehicles.

15. (SBU) In addition to monitoring the Tbilisi-based April 9 protests, we will also stay in close touch with OSCE, UN and EUMM monitors and report any additional information.  
TEFFT